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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN/BRIGHAM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PM](#) [POL](#) [SPECIALIST](#)

SUBJECT: FRAUD PREVENTION, OBSTRUCTIONISM, AND BICKERING.

PANAMA ELECTION COUNTDOWN #10: 3 WEEKS TO GO

Ref: A. Panama 0730

[1](#)B. Panama 0791

[1](#)C. Panama 0828

SUMMARY/COMMENT: EVERYONE PREPARING

[1](#)1. (SBU) Panama's May 2 election - only three weeks away - is starting to concentrate minds. The Electoral Tribunal is implementing fraud prevention procedures, informing voters, and fending off critics. Electoral Prosecutor Gerardo Solis depoliticized his investigation of the Presidency's legal slush fund by postponing it until after the election. Taking the opposite course, President Moscoso's entire cabinet publicly criticized Solis for exceeding his mandate under the constitution, a matter over which they have no authority. Jose Miguel Aleman (Arnulfista) and Guillermo Endara (Solidarity) are attacking each other as they compete for the same anti-PRD voters. With campaigning becoming more energetic and vigorous daily, Embassy still sees no indication that cheating or violence will mar May 2 polling. End Summary

What - No Ink?

[1](#)2. (U) The Electoral Tribunal's 4/2 decision not to mark voters' fingers with India ink after they vote on May 2 provoked strong criticism and allegations of potential electoral fraud. In previous elections, electoral officials marked each voter's index finger with indelible ink after he/she voted to prevent individuals from voting more than once. Electoral Magistrates decided that new information systems could crosscheck voting records and easily identify anyone voting more than once. Critics are concerned about identifying those using more than one identity cards, and that the lag between Election Day and data entry could delay definitive polling results; however, Magistrates Valdes and Allen strongly defended their decision. They claimed that during the 1999 Elections, only 100 people voted more than once. After the computer system caught them, they were brought to electoral trial, found guilty and sentenced.

One at a time, please

[1](#)3. (SBU) During a radio interview, Director for Education and Human Rights Promotion of the Ombudsman Office, Cesar Solano, announced that only blind individuals or those with motor impediments that limit their ability to write could be assisted at the voting booth. People with any other type of disability can be assisted all the way to the voting area, but should be left alone once there to vote. The goal is to protect voting secrecy. Solano shared privately with Embassy why the Electoral Tribunal and the Ombudsman's Office had addressed this issue. He mentioned allegations in the 1999 elections that political parties abused this entitlement in the remote Veraguas province 9-3 Electoral Circuit, "escorting" people without severe disabilities to the voting area and hovering over them at the voting booth. (See Reftel A.)

Moscoso's Legal "Secret" Slush Fund: The Saga Continues

[1](#)4. (SBU) Electoral Prosecutor Gerardo Solis put the entire Moscoso cabinet in a tizzy this week. On April 8, the 16-member cabinet made a joint statement that Solis' insistence on inspecting Ministry of the Presidency expense records to look for evidence that discretionary presidential funds were used illegally, to fund political activities, is itself illegal, unconstitutional, and politically motivated. On 4/5, Minister of the Presidency Mirna Pitti refused to answer Solis' questionnaire regarding expenditures in her office, stating President Moscoso herself handles the funds. Though Solis has no

legal authority to investigate Moscoso herself, it is common knowledge the Minister of the Presidency manages the funds on a day-to-day basis.

15. (SBU) Solis and others, including a former Electoral Magistrate and a former Supreme Court Justice, reacted by stating that Pitti cannot hide behind Moscoso and her Cabinet's position is wrong. Solis reiterated that he is not assuming that there has been any wrongdoing with the fund, but the GOP's position not to reveal details is questionable. Despite the Solis' threat of immediate legal action, he stood down and publicly announced that he had returned the questionnaire to Pitti and set a deadline for her reply after May 2. Solis justified his decision by saying that he does not want to influence the ongoing electoral process.

Endara & Aleman tit for tat

16. (SBU) Former President Guillermo Endara insists that he remains an Arnulfista, banking on disillusioned party members to support him. Endara explained that he does not support Moscoso, so he is not a "Mireyista." Noting his Arnulfista roots, Endara said that he is not "controlled by Moscoso or her corrupted inner circle." Throughout the campaign, members of Jose Miguel Aleman's campaign team have feared that Arnulfistas, particularly the illiterate, could get confused and vote for Endara, believing that Endara (instead of Aleman) is the Arnulfista candidate. Endara's original attempt to win Arnulfista votes by using late President Arnulfo Arias' image was censored by the Electoral Tribunal (ET), spurring Endara to criticize the institution. Aleman's team has made a strong internal effort to inform rural Arnulfistas that Aleman, not Endara, is the party presidential candidate.

17. (SBU) In a shameless vote-grabbing ploy, Arnulfista Presidential candidate Jose Miguel Aleman staged a photo-op with several Endara administration cabinet ministers, but many observers considered it distasteful that a son of one deceased cabinet member and the widow of another were included. Former Housing Minister Guillermo Quijano, a well-known construction developer and TGI Friday's franchisee, "reminded" Panamanians of the unique and adverse conditions immediately after Operation Just Cause when they took office, highlighting how fit they left Panama at the end of their term. But will that convince voters not to vote for Endara? Endara's running mate Guillermo Ford responded that everyone in Endara's cabinet worked under direct instructions from President Endara and they should share credit with Endara for their accomplishments. Ford encouraged Panamanians to vote for Endara on Election Day so the PRD could not take power.

Another flawed opinion poll

18. (SBU) Local company Investigacion y Mercadeo announced a poll using a new system. The polling system was implemented jointly with U.S.-based Greenberg Research, known for its work on Bill Clinton's campaign. Panama residents received computer-generated phone calls asking which presidential candidate they would vote for and to identify their choices by touch tone key. The sampling methodology is questionable. Four members of the Embassy Political Section found messages on their Embassy voicemail from the automated polling server upon arriving in the office on April 5. Like other opinion polls in Panama, this one does not appear very trustworthy. (See Reftel C.)

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